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ABSTRACT

The California Mentor Teacher Program is one of many efforts to improve teacher supply and quality, provide professional support, and offer alternative motivators and reward systems. This paper explores teacher leadership issues offered by this program. Using data from a 1985 joint study of the mentor initiative (by California State Department of Education and Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development), the analysis describes current program adaptations, stress points, and areas needing greater support. Findings show that (1) local program definitions vary enormously, (2) broad variations in mentoring control occur, and (3) most mentoring happens with experienced teachers working on curriculum and instruction. The program raises some individual and organizational stress points, including exemplary teacher status versus peer acceptance, unclear mentoring technology, and lack of effectiveness indicators ensuring the program's future. Increasing teachers' decision-making power and providing career advancement opportunities will require multiple sources of support. These include training and support to implement the program (mainly released time for teachers to work together), integration of mentor programs with other improvement initiatives, and planning to support teacher leadership and career development. Included are 3 tables and 28 references. (MLH)

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A STATE PERSPECTIVE ON TEACHER LEADERSHIP ROLES: THE POTENTIAL OF THE CALIFORNIA MENTOR TEACHER PROGRAM

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The purpose of this paper is to explore the teacher leadership issues offered by the California Mentor Teacher Program. Using data from a joint California State Department of Education (CSDE) and Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development (FWLERD) study of the mentor initiative, the analysis describes current program adaptations, stress points, and areas where support is needed to realize the career development goals which the program potentially affords.

Background

This analysis is informed by two lines of research--one which looks at the cultures of teaching (Feiman-Nemser & Floden, 1985; Lightfoot, 1983; Lortie, 1975) and another which concentrates on implementation of educational policy (Elmore and McLaughlin, 1982; Scott, 1981; Meyer and Rowan, 1977). In brief, those who have looked at the culture of teaching have found it quasi-professional (Duke, 1984), lacking in many extrinsic (Gallup, 1983) and intrinsic rewards (Mann, 1986; Cohen, 1973), and largely undifferentiated by status and specialization (Kerr, 1983). With few exceptions (Little, 1982; Kent, 1985), teaching is a largely isolated occupation, characterized by hierarchical rules and regulations, and limited to a horizontal career track (Sarason, 1982).

New attention is focusing on the teaching career, in light of changing student demographics, declining student achievement, and reports of inadequate teacher supply. Over the past three years, a virtual industry of commissioned studies has launched a number of efforts to remedy the teacher supply and quality problem (NCATE, ATE, California Commission on the Teaching Profession, etc.). Among the proposals and policies undertaken are recruitment campaigns, scholarship programs, alternative certification strategies, career ladders, and improved salary and working conditions. The California Mentor Teacher Program is one such initiative intended to provide support and assistance to the profession and serve as an occupational motivator and reward system. Unlike the Tennessee or Florida programs, the California initiative is not currently attached to performance evaluation, nor to movement on a specified career ladder. At the same time, it provides greater flexibility than other initiatives in what master teachers will do in their new roles.

It is too soon to know the fate of the mentor program in supporting increased status for the teaching profession. However, its prospect for "making a difference" can be improved by what we know of public policy implementation in the bureaucratic arena. The "issue attention cycle" in education is short (Downs, 1976); and most of what changes is either symbolic (Meyer and Rowan, 1977) or on the "margins" of the system, e.g., implementation of school lunch programs rather than changes in instructional practice (Kirst, 1982). Teachers, acting as "street-level bureaucrats," are frequently overwhelmed with rules and regulations in implementing state-level reforms and may consciously or subconsciously subvert the legislated intentions (Weatherley and Lipsky, 1977).

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Somewhat greater success at real organizational change has been found through initiatives which address the school as the unit of analysis and anticipate implementation variation, rather than lock-step installation. These "bottom-up" approaches are typically guided by state-mandated parameters and frameworks, but are expectant of local variation and adaptation (Fuller et al., 1986; Berman and McLaughlin, 1978). School Improvement programs and Chapter I initiatives, which are directed by teacher-parent teams at the school site, within district guidelines and limited state statutes, reflect this approach. And while these programs, too, can fall victim to the regulations obfuscating good instructional practice, the initiatives provide opportunity for local creativity and broad variation in school site implementation.

The California Mentor Teacher Program funds a master teacher initiative at the local district level. Legislative requirements are minimal and local discretion enormous, as most of the candidate qualifications, mentoring duties, and support functions are locally defined. The program provides opportunity for upgrading the professional role of teachers and uses their talents to assist and support their peers. What's still to be defined is whether the program will provide flexibility for teacher improvement and professional growth or will be tunnelled into an "extra work" initiative by bureaucratic rules.

Teachers have considerable experience with change. Research by Mager et al. on teacher career changes identified three themes which emerged as they studied teachers in periods of professional transition. These themes--a period of adaptation, coping with stress points, and finding sources of support--were part of each teacher's experience (Mager, et. al., 1986). Not coincidentally, these same themes emerge as we look at the implementation of the Mentor Teacher Program in California--an initiative which imposes a transition in work relations and teacher careers.

Data Sources

The analysis draws upon descriptive data collected from the 1985 Survey of Mentor Program Implementation conducted by the FWLERD and two surveys of mentor program implementation costs conducted by the CSDE. In addition, the analysis draws upon FWLERD case study data collected as part of a much broader study of teacher leadership roles and CSDE staff reports gathered during daily telephone conversations and face-to-face interactions with those implementing the program.

The program implementation survey of 740 districts participating in the 1984-85 mentor program was a collaborative effort of the Department and the Laboratory. Completed questionnaires were returned from 291 of 740 districts (a 39 percent response rate). Limited analysis of the responding and nonresponding districts by type indicates that elementary districts are underrepresented, with unified districts and county offices somewhat overrepresented.

Data sources are cited in the analysis below, with number of cases and standard deviations where appropriate.

Local Adaptations

Adapting to a new teaching assignment begins with the knowledge of the placement (Mager, et al., 1986). Similarly, local adaptations of the mentor program began with initial district discussions about the program, occurring

within the context of other district priorities, local collective bargaining histories, and teacher, administrator, and board interest in the program. Data from the survey yielded the following:

1. Local definitions of the program vary enormously. A six-month time line for initial implementation and the need to negotiate virtually every aspect of the program slowed initial implementation, but most districts had successfully negotiated the program by the 1984-85 school year (Kaye, 1985).

Conceptions of the program vary, but most districts have currently defined the program as extra work for extra pay, with mentors typically completing projects. Only 19 percent (53) of the SDE/FWLERD respondents reported that mentors were selected for their skills and knowledge and received extra pay for extra skill. Given the historic lack of differentiation among teaching roles, it is not surprising that initial implementation would define the changed status simply as the teacher's agreement to take on additional responsibilities. However, this conception seems to be evolving to one of greater teacher leadership as teachers and administrators modify the program in light of mentor success with teachers and need for greater discretion in role definition.

2. There is broad variation in the extent to which teacher time in mentoring is inspected and controlled. Informal reports indicate that at one extreme we have mentors who receive their \$4,000 stipend and complete a project at their leisure. At the other extreme, mentors must document each hour of their mentoring work and must complete 230 "approved" hours before receiving their stipend. Most frequently, mentors report completing logs of their work, spending an average of 23 hours per month in their mentoring duties (FWLERD: n=192 S.D.=14).

Most mentors (83 percent: n=231) follow a district-approved proposal and work with general supervision (73 percent: n=202). Thirty-six percent of the districts report that mentors work independently on their own (n=148), but 10 percent of the mentor coordinators report that mentors work with close supervision (n=30).

3. Most mentoring time is spent working with teachers on curriculum and instruction. The law requires that mentors spend a majority of their time teaching students (60 percent). However, in actual practice they are spending more than 90 percent of their time with students. Data from the 1985 survey of implementation costs indicate that substitute teachers are hired to cover mentor classes between 8 and 15 days (10 percent) rather than the 72 days potentially allowed by law.

In the summer of 1985, district coordinators reported that a majority of mentor time was spent working on curriculum materials. Table 1 reports the percent of time spent in particular mentoring activities (FWLERD, 1985).

Table 1
Main Objects of Mentor Work*

Percent of time	Mentor activities
47%	Mentors worked on curriculum or materials including: lesson plans, tests, syllabi, etc.
30	Mentors worked on instructional methods, including: lesson delivery, student grouping, learning theory, critical thinking, etc.
10	Mentors worked on equipment, including: computer hardware and software, A-V, etc.
6	Mentors worked on school climate and discipline issues.
5	Mentors worked on instructional strategies for special populations, including: methods of limited English speakers, handicapped, etc.
2	Other

100

*Mentoring time reported as mean percentage of time devoted to improvements in curriculum, instructional methods, special population strategies, etc.

Initial mentoring work focused primarily on curriculum development. This is not surprising for several reasons:

- New state graduation requirements legislated at the same time as the mentor program encouraged curriculum development.
- Curriculum development is more easily defined and measured in a project mode than instructional work with other teachers in classrooms.
- Curriculum development is less threatening as a status change than collegial interaction with other teachers.

In the past year, mentor coordinators report informally that mentoring work has begun to shift to more of a training role, as mentors conduct workshops and support teachers through peer observation and coaching.

4. A majority of mentoring time (47 percent) is spent working with other experienced teachers (FWLERD, 1985). Seventy-five percent of the responding districts indicated that mentors spend less than a third of their time working with new teachers (n=289).

It's unclear why this is the case. The law gives priority to mentor work with new teachers, but it may be that shortages are restricted to certain geographic areas and academic fields, or that the shortage reports are simply overdrawn (Rumberger, 1986).

5. Patterns of mentor work--their use of plans, the extent to which they receive direction, and the size of their mentoring group--are just emerging.* Data from the FWLERD survey indicate that:
- In deciding what to do, mentors work with district and school plans with almost equal frequency (71 percent, 81 percent).
 - In 38 percent of the cases, mentors use formal or systematic needs assessments to define their work. In the remainder of the cases, needs assessments were individual or informal.
 - Mentors work as frequently across schools in a district ("often" in 72 percent of the cases) as they do in their own school (59 percent of the cases).
 - They tend to work with individual teachers or groups of teachers (reported as "often" or "always" by 62 percent of the respondents) much more than with whole faculties (32 percent).
 - Mentoring activities are most frequently initiated by other teachers (as reported by 64 percent of the respondents). However, both mentors and administrators also initiate mentoring work with other teachers. (Mentors initiate "often" in 43 percent of the cases, administrators in 37 percent of the cases.)

Stress Points

The ability to control and direct the events that affect their lives, achieving success at work, and change in the workplace create stress in teachers' lives (Mager, et al., 1986). One suspects that these stress points impact us all, but they are particularly salient for those whose occupational rewards are ambiguous and whose occupational status is both in question and undergoing change.

The Mentor Teacher Program focuses a number of individual and organizational stress points for just these reasons--it challenges the historic egalitarian norm of teaching; it lacks a clear technology for implementation, and it's unknown whether its legislated goals are substantively related to its practice or future. Among the issues raised over the past two years are:

1. The mentor's dilemma. Tom Bird, principal investigator in the 1985 FWLERD study of teacher leadership roles, describes the "mentor's dilemma." Mentors are caught between the proverbial "rock and a hard place." They must both acknowledge their status as exemplary teachers in order to accept additional pay and perception of success, while simultaneously sustaining their classroom teacher identification in order to be accepted by peers.

*Item allowed multi-response, so number of cases varies from 260 to 288.

New mentors frequently report that they "don't know how to act with other teachers" and are concerned about "being pushy." (Bird, 1986)

Their concerns are probably well-founded; in a case study of a special education resource teacher, Milofsky found that resource specialists felt ostracized by other teachers in the building (Milofsky, 1976). However, the extent to which mentors are perceived as "different" and without a role niche seems to be context-specific. Case study data suggest that districts with strong staff development histories, where there is Board and administrative commitment to school-based improvement efforts with substantive teacher involvement, seem to experience less organizational disruption when implementing the mentor program. Similarly, individual teachers who come into the role with a background in special projects, staff training, and organizational leadership report less personal stress in defining a comfortable mentor role for themselves.

Nonetheless, mentors are at some risk. The program lacks an organizational history, and thus few precedents for role definition. Defining an appropriate mentorship is particularly difficult in districts where teacher-administrator relations and the use of time are largely defined by contractual negotiations or where staff development is individually supported outside of school hours at one's own expense.

2. Unclear technology for mentoring. There are no easy answers to: which teachers should be mentors, what should mentors do, and how should other teachers work with them. Teacher leadership has been defined in numerous ways and, while we most often think of collegial support for instruction as central to the leadership role, mentors have made important contributions in roles in which they are not engaged in collegial relations or leadership with other teachers (Little, 1982; Lieberman, 1984). Some of these include: designing curriculum improvement processes, writing actual curricula, organizing resources for teacher-administrator work, and facilitating teacher interaction with categorical program staff.

Perhaps the most sensitive of the issues arising out of a lack of a clear technology for mentoring is the demarcation between being a teacher and being an administrator. Thirty-seven percent of the respondents in the FWLERD study reported that mentors took direction from administrators--which translates in many cases to "asking mentors to work with marginal teachers" or asking mentors to undertake curriculum supervision which teachers deem an administrative role (n=108: FWLERD, 1985).

Mentors are precluded by law from evaluating others. However, supervising others is an acceptable role, albeit a difficult one to disentangle from evaluation. Where mentors are supervising teachers, a sharp distinction is drawn between "giving feedback and advice on instructional practices" and "making recommendations on instructional practices which will be used for making employment decisions."

3. Lack of effectiveness indicators. The tenuous relationship between legislated mentor goals, program content, and program future.

Legislated goals are written vaguely; they may be "solutions in a search of a problem" or, more frequently, hypotheses being tested. The

Mentor Teacher Program falls into the latter category. It is substantially unknown where the legislative goals will encourage teachers to continue within the profession or use the program as a route to administration or formal staff development roles.

Will successful mentors want to continue teaching or mentoring? Or will the program serve as a "route out" to becoming a school administrator or trainer in private industry? How will the mentoring role evolve? It's too soon to know whether the "right people" became mentors, whether they will stay in the role, or how the program will evolve.

The goal ambiguity and lack of effectiveness indicators create role stress. Is it a staff development initiative? Are mentors receiving merit pay? What about the effects on their own teaching? How does the program fit in the larger policy context? What is an appropriate teacher leadership role?

We don't have answers to these questions. However, we should study the mentor program in the context of other initiatives to improve the teaching profession. For instance, a number of efforts are underway to:

- Define meaningful expectations for preparation and training for entry into teaching, including requirements that individuals demonstrate knowledge and skills appropriate for induction before being licensed in the profession (NCATE revision, California Commission on the Teaching Profession recommendations, etc.).
- Develop standards for good teaching practice, written and policed by the profession (Carnegie Forum, AFT Professional Standards Boards).
- Encourage collegial interaction and greater autonomy to make professional decisions in the workplace, etc. (California Commission on the teaching profession).
- Provide alternative routes within a profession to encourage development of specialties and recognize expertise, creativity, and initiative (career development systems in Tennessee, Florida).

Sources of Support

Supportive and sensitive leadership, involvement in schoolwide decisions, and the availability of assistance are related to teacher enthusiasm, professionalism, and career fulfillment (Goodlad, 1984). Without knowing the precise future of the mentor program, it's clear that increasing teacher involvement in decision making about their work lives and providing them with opportunities for career advancement will require support from multiple sources. In this final section, we examine sources of support for teacher leadership.

1. Training and support for implementing the Mentor Teacher Program

One-third of the state mentor teacher appropriation is allocated for the implementation costs of the program. These funds are intended to support training for mentor teachers, release time for mentors and other

teachers to work together, and expenses associated with coordination and selection. Table 2 below summarizes district allocation of the other cost allowance in 1984-85.

Table 2

Summary of District Use of Mentor Teacher Other Cost Allowance

	Average cost
Cost of selecting mentors	\$ 131
Program coordination	181
Indirect costs	117
Employee benefits	115
Equipment	155
Supplies	303
Release time for mentors	397
Release time for other teachers	159
Training for mentors	183
Other	169
TOTAL (n=227)	\$1,908

Districts expended approximately \$544 on administrative costs of the program, including selection, coordination, indirect, and employee benefits. The Legislature set a ceiling in 1986 of \$600 per mentor for costs associated with program administration. We found few instances of costs exceeding this ceiling, and districts have not reported excessive difficulty in complying with this requirement. This may change, however, if the other cost allowance is substantially reduced.

Release time is the most expensive item. While the law allows mentors to potentially take 72 release days, there is both insufficient funding to support this much time (\$680-6,480) and mentors, other teachers, administrators, and parents don't want mentors out of the classroom that much. As noted earlier, mentors are released between 8 and 15 days a year (\$496-975) to receive training and to work with other teachers. However, many mentors report receiving no release time at all and conducting all of their mentoring work during the summer or after school.

Releasing teachers to work with others is a two-edged sword. On the one hand, it organizationally recognizes the need for teachers to work together during their regular work day, a hallmark of professional

interaction. On the other hand, it takes teachers out of the classroom. The community norms for having our best teachers teaching children restricts the amount of approved release time and reduces the amount of teacher-to-teacher interaction in favor of teacher-to-student interaction.

This is a problematic aspect of the mentor program likely to become even more so over time. As mentors become more interactive with peers, in need of more release time, and less willing to spend personal time on mentoring, they will be confronted with internal and external pressures to stay in the classroom to sustain their good teacher status, yet need release time to get the mentoring job done. One way to remedy this is to give mentors somewhat reduced teaching loads to allow them time to work with other mentors and teachers during the regular school day, but without forcing a class of students to repeatedly work with substitute teachers. Another approach is to train a cadre of "mentor substitutes" so that students have continuity with the same substitute teacher when mentors must be outside of the classroom.

The FWLERD study also assessed training needs of mentor teachers. Perceived training needs of mentor teachers are reported in Table 3.

Table 3

Percent of Coordinators Reporting
Priority Mentor Teacher Training Needs*

	Percent (n=227)
Consultation, classroom observation and training skills	63%
Subject matter or curriculum development	50
Instructional skills training	43
Meetings or conferences to share approaches	40

*Multiple response results in percentages exceeding 100 percent

Over 60 percent of the coordinators reported that mentors need assistance in consultation, observation, and training skills. This seems to indicate that districts are attempting to implement the mentor role in a training and collegial support mode. In supporting statements, coordinators also indicated that this direct training should be balanced with district-level assistance to organizationally support the program through flexible scheduling, opportunities for teachers to meet with one another, and reasonable teaching assignments. At the same time, the state should adjust the program's funding cycle to match district planning schedules.

2. Articulation of the mentor program with other improvement initiatives

Support for the mentor program is only one form of teacher leadership support. If the mentor program is to succeed and "make a difference," it must be allowed to adapt to local conditions and be articulated with other improvement efforts. The mentor program cannot become an isolated categorical program, but must instead be integrated with School Improvement, Chapter 1, Bilingual Education, and the variety of mini-grant programs, e.g., the Classroom Teacher Instructional Improvement grants. This is occurring in a number of places where mentors now serve as team leaders for site staff development to coordinate activities authorized under multiple staff development funding sources. However, such coordination and collaboration are both rare and essential if professional development is to be less fragmented.

3. Development of new initiatives to support teacher leadership and career development

The Mentor Teacher Program is just one of a number of initiatives designed to improve the teaching profession. To date, most of its effects have been in the staff development arena. To effect the kind of system-wide improvements in teacher leadership for the profession, we need to simultaneously improve teacher salaries, working conditions, and public relations of professional accountability.

The 1985 California Commission on the Teaching Profession Report cited 27 recommendations to improve the professional lives of teachers. Among other things, they recommended higher salaries, smaller classes, more coordinated staff development programs, residencies to support teachers in their induction years, and a candidate-based assessment system, all activities which in their view would contribute to increasing the status and professionalism of the occupation. A number of initiatives have been proposed to realize these goals. Chief among them is the development of a candidate-based assessment system for supporting entry into the profession, staff development, and career opportunities. Of particular concern is the need for effective assessment system to reflect a realistic, practice-based continuum of skills and knowledge to teach, rather than a laundry list of minimum competencies. Thus, as we move toward a career development system, it's critical that we learn from the experience of others, so as to avoid reinventing the wheel or duplicating the mistakes.

Teaching is a complex task, and effecting substantive change takes time. Many of the reforms to revitalize and professionalize teaching fail to address teaching work in all of its complexity. We can't legislate good teaching, but we can legislate the salary and organizational structures to support the occupation, and we can ask institutions and families to support the working conditions and home environments to support the teaching and learning process. At the same time, the institutions which support teaching--schools, colleges and universities, district offices, and state agencies--can minimize bureaucratic rules and develop opportunities for teachers to assume greater leadership roles. A single solution won't work; the levers of salary, working conditions, participatory management, professional development, and community support must be pulled simultaneously if teachers are to view the occupation as a career, one in which their development is encouraged and their contributions are rewarded.

The California Mentor Teacher Program is just one approach to support this effort. Taken from a narrowly construed, simplistic perspective, it can be implemented simply as a mini-grant program. However, taken more comprehensively, the initiative provides opportunity to recognize and reward exemplary practice, engage teacher leadership skills in the development of others, and set the stage for incremental improvements in the career development of our teaching profession.

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